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## The voice of reason by the children in the wilderness

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**Abstract:** Wars and tribal conflicts disrupt young children who are dependent on their parents for care, empathy, attention and protection. Some children end up in refugee camps unaccompanied by their parents or guardians. The long migration to freedom, in search of “my identity” and a sense of belonging is characterized by violation of the children’s basic rights. The traumatic experiences worsen in cases of sexual exploitation of either the children and or their parents. They suffer physically and emotionally. In this article, I present the voice of the children in the wilderness expressed by a selection of a few poems by the children in the refugee camps. The analysis of this presentation is anchored on the following questions: what are the feelings, hopes and aspirations of the young children in the refugee camps? Which poetic stylistic devices are used in articulating their voices? The objective of the presentation is to recognize, analyze and appreciate the voice of reason as articulated by the young poets. The analysis adopts a psycholinguistic approach to the selected poems which form the corpus of data analysis. In essence and as a resultant or findings of this analysis, the metaphoric allusions, tonal expressions and personification present a profound reality of the cry of the innocence, optimism and idealism raised by the children’s voices. Through the linguistic expressions and stylistic devices, the children yearn for peace, stability, security and a return to their homelands. The poetic expressions form a basis of responses to the catastrophic experiences. The voice of reason by the children in the wilderness is not only an academic contribution, but maybe useful to psychologists and other researchers to understand the plight of the children in refugee camps.

**Keywords:** Children, poetry, war, trauma, voice.

### 1. Introduction and critical paradigms

The voice of reason by the children in the wilderness critically examines the reasoning, expressions and voices from selected poems by refugee children. The concepts, “voice of reason” and “wilderness” as used in this presentation, were carefully and cautiously selected to philosophically express the artistic presentation of the experiences of the young children who find themselves in a situation that they have no knowledge about. Bond (2000: 1) notes that “refugee camps are places where as in prisons or mental hospitals, the inhabitants are depersonalized. People become numbers without names”. Thus, wilderness is figuratively used in this context. Context plays an important role in deducing meaning. As Berleant (n.d) puts it, despite the fact that metaphor has been the subject of philosophic and literary reflection since classical times, it remains elusive. Borrowing from Berleant’s discussion, “wilderness is a dark metaphor which evokes a feeling of apprehension, danger, and dissolution, alien and hostile conditions”. We may think of a refugee camp as a hostile place with limited room to preserve and promote human values and social justice. Washington (n.d.) depicts this as a human exclusion zone. Figurative understanding of the refugee camp as a wilderness would therefore help track the insights of the loneliness, lost lives and cultures of many of its occupants, masked cruelty, and horrifying feelings of neglect, trauma and oppression as is expressed in most of the poems analyzed in this presentation.

According to Landauer and Rowlands (2001: n.p.), “reason is the process of thinking; it uses ideas, memories, emotions and sensory input. Reason uses logic, deduction and induction. It means integrating perceptions into concepts, gaining knowledge through integration, evaluating and manipulating ideas and facts”. Aristotle has pointed out that poetic language is a great inspiration to both the listener and the poet. He holds that poetry represents life. Poetry appeals to emotions. Poetry is a power tool that can be used to philosophically reason out an experience.

Half the world's refugee population is comprised of children and adolescents as noted by Cole (1998) cited in Trang and Lau (2002: n.p.), whereby over 18 million children are raised in the war prone regions. A report by Sarah Wildman (2017: n.p.) on world refugee day) notes that of more than 65 million people displaced around the world, of which 51% are children. According to United Nations, in Uganda for example "the number of refugees increased in the past year from 500,000 to 1.25 million. Of these 86 percent are women and children". These sentiments were evidenced by empirical researches carried out by Dr. Muller (2013) who notes that,

following the genocide in Rwanda, more than 60% of children claimed that they didn't care if they ever grew up. Children between the ages of 12-18, having had more years exposed to violent conflict, struggle to recover from years of compounding traumas. Interviews within refugee camps reveal pervasive feelings of depression, anxiety, hopelessness, grief, resentment, anger, and fear.

According to Trang and Lau (2002: n.p.),

children and adolescents are subjected to violent death of parents, torture, injury, witness of murder, terrorist attack, child soldier, detention, sexual assault, separation and forced migration, fear and panic among parents. Other forms of trauma may include the endurance of political oppression, harassment and deprivation of human rights.

Muller (2013: n.p.) makes reference to Graça Machel United Nations Report of 1996 quoting: "The physical, sexual and emotional violence to which they [children] are exposed shatters their world. War undermines the very foundations of children's lives, destroying their homes, splintering their communities and breaking down their trust in adults". Meanwhile Muller reports that "over two million children have been killed, six million disabled, 20 million are homeless, and more than one million separated from their caregivers. Many have escaped to Iraq, Egypt, and other countries across the Middle East, Europe and Africa". Wildman (2017) observes that "refugee camps for instance Dadaab is overcrowded while, Jordan and Lebanon are overstretched by the Syrian crisis".

Identity issues by the refugees and asylum seekers partly contribute to traumatic experiences of the victims. In view of Kebede (2010), the act of being made a refugee from a socialist and essentialist perspective means separating and dislocating a person from his ancestral home against his/her wish thus cutting off his sense of belonging, thus creating a sense of insecurity is a permanent psycho-socio trauma. According to Kebede (2010), in this error of racism, nationalism, ethnicity and tribalism, the brand on identity and identification through legal documents such as an identity card and a passport or asylum documents is one such harassment. Erikson (1995) cited in Kebede (2010) notes that during childhood, a person's self-awareness grows and alters, while in adolescence awareness of "who I am" becomes more complex, beginning to take into account the physical, cognitive and social changes that occur. As Erikson notes, the process of searching for identity is intensified and becomes more complex in the case of forced immigrants often leading to painful 'struggle for belonging'. The quest for identity is further interrogated by Bond (2000: 6) who raises pertinent questions on how many African governments ensure that the birth of every refugee child born on their soil is registered and that each child has a birth certificate. What nationality will these children have? Who assumes responsibility for unaccompanied minors?

A study carried out by Awet (2011), United Nations High Commission for Refugees Policy

Development and Evaluation (PDES) records that activities such as music, theatre, poetry, and painting may provide useful tools for improving the quality of life for camp residents. She affirms that creative activities play a positive role in their ability to survive physically, emotionally and spiritually. The children join in the call for peace and harmony among the warring communities.

Olszewska, (2007) expresses that poetry (both oral and written) has a long tradition in Afghanistan,

It continues to be the most respected and most widely practiced arts. It has had a direct relationship with power and politics for dialogue between Afghan and Iranians, and for expressing subjective experience, thought and emotion among refugees, particularly love or the pain of exile, with an intention to criticize or subvert social convention.

Morag Styles (2011) a Professor of children poetry, makes reference to Motion (n.d.) a poet laureate who has vested great interest in children poetry. She quotes Motion's sentiments that "every possible effort should be made to promote the appreciation of poetry, and encourage its creation". Poetry allows children to feel a profound sense of connection with their interior spaces. The voice of reason as expressed through poetry awakens the world, community and the society to what must be done to restore the dignity and prosperity of the affected children. Despite the "imprisonment" the harrowing physical and psychological traumatic experiences, the children create alternative means of expressing their feelings and emotions through creative arts as a survival skill.

This presentation reveals how the young poets create a sense of belonging, histories and societal changes. Poetry is embraced as a powerful weapon for social and psychological changes. As will be seen, poetry presents a series of images which engages the speaker and the hearer in a creative thinking and reasoning in order to understand the complex environment the children find themselves in. In this respect, the analysis employs a psycholinguistic approach to analyzing the poetry in question. The psycholinguistic approach to language takes into consideration how we develop, perceive or produce language. It creates a platform on which both linguistics and psychology knowledge interact to reach a desirable meaning.

## **2. Psycholinguistic theoretical principles**

Psycholinguistics is the study of language from a psychological perspective. Psychology is the science that deals with mental processes and behavior. It includes feelings, attitudes, thoughts and other mental processes.

As expounded by Lutz and Huitt (2004), psychological studies grounded on Jean Piaget's philosophical thinking indicate that early behaviors and experiences influence subsequent development achievements. The psycholinguistic approach will enable us to perceive knowledge of the underlying language process in the human mind (the poet) and how it is then articulated through communication. Children exposed to stressful environments are prone to traumatic reactions for longer periods. This may cause developmental impairment. As psychologists point out, what they see, hear and experience is stored in their mind forever. The intuitive use of poetry elucidates emotive meaning and expression of the horrific feelings that the young survivors go through. Poetic creativity becomes a therapeutic means of shading the emotions and feelings and a means of fighting back to the ills of the society. As will be analyzed later, the selected poems expose such horrors as destruction of the victims homes, death of parents, siblings, neighbors and friends, physical injuries, torture, sexual harassments, witness of parental fear and panic, forced immigration and settlement in refugee camps. Psycholinguistic as a scientific method is useful in

analyzing how the experiences are perceived by the victims, comprehended and produced.

Akhter (2013) denotes that poetry represents thoughts, imagination and awareness, experiences expressed through meaning, sound, rhythmic language in such a way as to evoke emotional response. Furthermore as expressed by Hoon (2014), language is a system of formalized symbols, signs, sounds or gestures. Psycholinguistic theories consider properties of the human mind as well as structure of language. Cognitive knowledge about linguistic context and the world play an immediate role in comprehension and interpretation of words and sentences. Norris (2010: 21) observes that “mental images anchor new ideas in a readers mind by linking abstract ideas to concrete experiences”. Thus the psychological process involved in comprehending the meaning of the poem cannot be underestimated in our analytical process.

Psycholinguistics has three primary areas: Language comprehension, language production and language acquisition. This presentation singles out Language comprehension and, language production. The guiding principles include **exposure to input and processing of the meaning**:

**Exposure to input** is a psycholinguistic principle that will be employed to make reference to how both the analyst skill and knowledge input together with the poet intelligence are used in crafting the production of meaning. This entails drawing attention to lexical items and psycholinguistic concepts such as attentions, detection, noticing, awareness and consciousness as well as their connotations within their contextual parameters. The psycholinguistic approach will be used to extract out the poet’s inbuilt units of language within the poetic texts for instance sounds, syllables, intonation, repetition, allusions and parallelism. These in-puts are key in creating aesthetics or artistic thematic meaning. Schmidt (2001) cited in Agiasophiti (2011: 12) expresses that the engaging aesthetic nature of poetry holds a listeners attention. Attention to the sounds and voices of the young poets is key to understanding production of the inner voice.

According to Romero & Soria (2005) “construction of meaning is heavily dependent upon a process of interpretation, comprehension and expansion of the literal meanings against the metaphoric expressions”. According to Damrosch et al (1985: 990) a metaphor is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two things that are basically dissimilar; it describes one thing in terms of another. The analysis of the metaphoric use of poetic language in this section takes into cognizance the cognitive metaphor perspective. Romero and Soria (2005) further state that “The basic assumption in cognitive metaphor theory is that there is a set of ordinary metaphoric concepts – conceptual metaphors- around which we conceptualise the world”. They draw their knowledge from *Metaphors We Live By* as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Johnson (1987), Lakoff (1987), and Lakoff and Tuner (1989). The cognitive theory complements the psycholinguistic theory in that a metaphor is identified when the speaker perceives both contextual abnormality and conceptual contrast. This identification of the metaphoric utterance triggers the metaphoric mechanisms for its interpretation.

**Processing of meaning** takes into cognizance perception, memory and thinking. Poems have unique word structures or short non grammatical sentence structures. Psycholinguistic reasoning will be helpful in understanding how the linguistic and psychological processes interact to enable production, comprehension and creation of meaning of the poem produced.

### 3. Research methodology

The research employed purposive random sampling in selecting information rich cases for in depth study (Patton 1990). Primary data targeted poems of central importance to the thematic area. The poems were collected from internet sources. Initially no concrete target population was put in mind. However after a long term survey, five poems were selected for analysis. As elaborated by Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbin (2015), the general aim of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation or context

surrounding a phenomenon. Criteria for selection of relevant poems included content based on thematic concerns of refugee children, poems articulated by children, poems displaying different poetic devices and diverse linguistic features.

The analytical intention was to ground my discussion and reflections in the intricacies and complexities of the life experiences of the young poets. I was deeply immersed into the narration in order to get to the deeper meaning of the poems. The analytic approach took cognizance of thematic, content and context in order to arrive to a holistic understanding of the underlying cognitive structures, socio-emotional or affective domains of the poem. The strategies used in the poetic enquiry involved “listening” to the voice of the poet, critical analysis of the use of images and metaphors, observations on how hope reconstructs identity, monitoring the expressions on how attitude reconstructs self in relation to others while capturing rhythmic and poetic quality of the linguistic features. Most important is how the poetic expressions tell us about individual thinking or feelings; personal experience and perception of the realities around them. Critical observations into complex patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction evidenced in the articulations enabled conceptualization of certain conclusions during the interpretation of data.

The organization of form and structure of the poem enabled the reconstruction of the overall thematic expression of the poet. It was important to consider how the poem is structured, its context and producer. Analysis of figurative language taking into consideration symbolism, similes, metaphors and personification was key. The poets’ beliefs, values, intentions and aspirations guided the interpretation of the poem.

#### **4. The metaphoric Voice of Reason as expressed by Samir**

Refugee poetry seems to be a philosophical and intellectual medium used by the young refugee poet to express thoughts, feelings and emotions. As one reads and analyses the poem by Samir, you feel the intensity of the emotions of sadness, loneliness, anger and even happiness as some of the themes displayed in the text below. The poem has a total of ten stanzas. However, eight stanzas have been selected for an in-depth analysis. Before delving into the analysis, it is imperative to note that Samir’s expression attracted attention of four Georgians; Dr. Omar Lattouf, William Burke, Dr. Emma Lattouf, and Zeena Lattouf who offered to help him.

##### *1. My days filled with peace, and void of strife*

*My parents, my friends were my whole world*

*I am Samir*

##### *2. And then there were bombs, we walked for miles*

*I remember tears, there were no smiles*

*My home, my world, came to halt*

*There was only fear*

3. *Everything we owned, on my mother's back*

*All the things we had, now fit in a sack*

*My mom, my sister, we all held hands,*

*But where was Dad?*

4. *So many people some that I knew*

*There were some men, but only a few*

*My days, my weeks were now a journey*

*That had no end*

5. *I saw the hope in my mother's eyes*

*Reduced to fear, and muffled cries*

*She held us close, at night with love*

*We stuck together*

8. *I met some people that were nice to me.*

*I wish they had stayed, but that could not be.*

*They left some candy and wonderful hugs,*

*But they gave me more*

9. *I am starting to work to overcome this war*

*I am learning to see, beyond this camp, there is more*

*My world my life that came to a halt*

*Is starting to move*

10. *I saw it in their eyes, they made me see*

*There is a world of hope, offered to me*

*I will conquer the fear, I will be free of these bonds*

*I am Samir, I am Samir*

(Arab America 2016)

The voice expressed denotes first person singular. This alludes to self-experience. Samir narrates his historical past with a conscious selection of *peace* and *void of strife* metaphorically to denote his home environment that was calm and stable. Samir's parents were alive and they made his life complete. There was a great bond between him and his family. In the second stanza, the reader meets the poet at a crucial moment transiting to a negative life style. In the opening lines of the second stanza the reader comes across many images of harrowing experiences *bombs, tears, fears, no smiles, life coming to a halt*. The choice of these coherently creates a sad episode. The mention of a bomb sends the hearing senses and feelings of scare and scampering for safety. The metaphorical use of *tears* and *fears* express the intensity of the confusing thought process and mental torture of the poet; a devastating state of affairs and a psychological traumatic experience.

The same mood of sadness is carried over to the third stanza voicing a feeling that in the wake of the war, Samir's family disintegrated. The situation called for all of them to move as a family but one member, her dad was not there. Wars create calamities and vacuums. The family structure collapses as is in the case of Samir. "*But where was Dad*". The ideology behind this question by Samir can only be interpreted in the context of the presented text. It is not by coincidence that Samir observes in stanza 4 line 2 that there were a few men. The psycholinguistic processing of this phrase may lead the analyst to imagine that maybe Samir's father ran away to save his life whereas, Samir's mother struggled to save and shelter the children to destination. Wars create rifts among families, but does Samir's voice express that! What would be the point of reason given the information supplied by Samir? The input sentiments under the given context may suggest that Samir's dad and other men could not endure the suffering to destination.

The text constitutes a summary as well as a climax of the disintegration of the poet's personality; his sinking into total distress, *I remember tears, there were no smiles*. The sad feelings and state of despair is complimented by the experiences shown by his mother in line 1 and 2 of stanza 5; *I saw the hope in my mother's eyes, reduced to fear, and muffled cries*. This metaphor of "hope reduced to fear" would be taken as the anti-climax of Samir's future. Samir's mother had been depicted as an icon or a symbol of hope, tolerance and endurance. She stood firmly as a unifying factor to her family. Unfortunately, her emotional and psychological weakening impacts negatively on Samir.

The journey motif is expressed in the memorable images of the scaring bombs which scattered Samir's family thus destroying the bright future of the young poet as expressed in stanza 4 lines 3 and 4: *My days my weeks were now a journey that had no end*. The journey motif

choreographed with the approach of time *days* and *weeks* suggest the struggles that the poet and her family went through for a long time. The journey metaphor points to a fact that the future of the poet was unpredictable. Such a scenario may cause despair.

After rethinking carefully and reasoning out, Samir's voice gradually rejuvenates, this time giving a livelier mood of presentation. This opportunity is seized after meeting the visitors who came to visit their camp. The transition to a better life and hope is expressed in stanza 8. The wonderful hugs and the promises given raise the poet's self-esteem. The poet's emotions are empowered. He was given both physical and psychological hope. The melody sounds sweet and encouraging in the last line: *But they gave me more*. This is then complimented in stanza 10: *I saw it in their eyes, they made me see*. She promises to turn his past into a hopeful future. This new state gives Samir a reason to express confidence and courage that he will conquer the fear. Remember the fear that had caused him tears before in the second stanza. *I will conquer the fear, I will be free of these bonds*. These are metaphors of hope, success and positive thinking. Finally Samir's life that came to a halt started to move. As was noted before by Akhter (2013) and Hoon (2014) (the mood and intonation felt and the rhythmic gesture expressed by the reader point to a positive turn of events. The solitary voice and the solitary vision of reason are all fused in this poem to give it a happy ending.

In conclusion, we find that though the poet began at a low mood, he ends with a self-encouragement, a strong ego, self-assertiveness, and initiative to conquer the fear. The metaphoric voice of reason by Samir contributes to the main question of this research on decision making and taking up personal responsibilities to transform the existing state of affairs.

## 5. The Imagery of the Disenfranchised Mind

To illustrate the above sub-topic the analysis engages the poem **Refugee Child** below. According to Llorens (2003:2), "imagery refers to images produced in the mind by language, whose words may refer either to experiences which could produce physical perception...". "In literature images are triggered off by language and through them, a poet recalls or evokes instances of physical and sensual perception. Language could therefore be considered a bridge linking the external world (of which we gain awareness through perception) and the human mind". In the following poem, the imagery produced may be in a form of allegory, simile or metaphor. The figurative language would be analyzed in relation to how it complements its tone, mood and theme and most important is how the contextual happening disenfranchises the mind of the poet, the refugee child.

*You look at me with such venom and disgust  
Like I'm not human and have a contagious disease  
But can't you see, I'm just an innocent child  
For a moment put yourself in my shoes  
Think of me like I'm your child  
Why judge what you don't understand?  
How would you feel to see your mother raped?  
Your father burnt before your eyes?  
I used to dream, I used to fantasize,  
of a beautiful life beyond my childhood  
I still remember my home blown away,  
with these games of war that they play  
My playground destroyed with their bombs  
That had no concern for my ruined toys  
I'm just a child, how did I hurt you?*



*I have nowhere to go, nobody to care  
 Living in refugee camps was no luxury  
 Don't you see the horror in my eyes?  
 Can you not feel the pain as I tremble?*

(Silent One Poetry n.d.)

The voice in this poem is a lamentation of the child who pleads innocence in all the happenings yet bears the consequences of the war: *I'm just a child, how did I hurt you?* We encounter a dialogic communication or rather presentation of expressions by the poet. The verse presents a slow rhythm with a bitter and resentful tone. We however note that the poet does not reveal his or her gender, neither do we get the name of the poet. Thus, it makes it complicated to make reference to the poet. I will hence refer to the poet as innocent child. The diction chosen, articles, verbs and phrases all point to a dialogue between the innocent child and someone or a group of people. It is evident that the poet represented by the first person "I" (singular) is directly interacting with the reader or listener (represented by the pronoun "you"). The use of "I" is a tacit form of reflection and recollection of the self. It appeals to the emotion, making the poetic voice more authoritative. Further the poet uses the pointer feature "you" making the conversation more versatile and relatable between the self and others. The poem starts on a harsh or disgusting tone. The silent voice of the addressee though taken to be innocent seems to be senseless, most probably undermining the poet's existence or feelings. The addressee in this case must be an adult since one does not expect the poet to address a fellow child with the phrase *Think of me like I'm your child*. Who would be blamed for causing pain of the innocent child? This is a philosophical question. One might imagine that it is the addressee in the first line. However the analyst too is convinced that the poet is exonerating the first addressee as he/she points an accusing finger to other people; *with these games of war that they play*. The use of third person plural is a pointer to someone else (group of people), implicated to have contributed to the poet's tribulations. In this line, war is likened to a game that is played. The phrase is metaphorical in nature. Essentially a game is enjoyed and not meant to torture the mind of the spectators to the extent and experience displayed in this poem.

The psycholinguistic technique is creatively interwoven by the poet when he/she paints a picture of images alluding to self as an innocent child who does not deserve all that is happening around him/her. In the opening line, the reader meets a disgusted image in the mind of the addressee which enables the poet to perceive that the addressee likened the innocent child with one who has contagious diseases. This in essence may be taken as an extended simile. To be able to justify and make clearer his/her position, the innocent child catches attention of the reader in line 4: *for a moment put yourself in my shoes*. This is an idiomatic expression that begs the audience to empathize with the poet. It calls upon the initiators of war and calamities to imagine the feelings and trauma that the victims go through. The comparison made to a contagious disease is one scenario that causes stigmatization and discriminatory behavior towards immigrants. The imagery point to exclusion, intimidation and making refugees look inferior.

The sentiments by the refugee child are an emotional lamentation and criticism of the world. Despite finding a home in the refugee camp, the refugee child is socially discriminated, segregated and mistreated. Life is biased against him/her. He is likened to a contagious disease. This experience affirms Bond's (2000) observation that refugee camps are places where inhabitants are depersonalized. Most probably the people around the innocent child have no understanding of his/her past as captured in: *Why judge what you don't understand?* In lines 7 and 8, the poet gives a very awful picture by asking rhetorical questions; *how would you feel to see your mother raped?*

*Your father burnt before your eyes?* These images of decay of moral character created by wars and mayhem contribute to social injustice. They illustrate the poet's deep sense of frustration, anger, trauma and anguish. Once more, the poetic expression affirms Graça Machel (Muller 2013) who reports that the physical, sexual and emotional violence to which the children are exposed shatters their world. The sense of feel and sight, complemented with the phrase *before your eyes* is a bitter manifestation of a disentranced mind. Such experiences may be everlasting in the mind of the victim.

The poet employed metrical pattern sounds making the poem flow smoothly as it is recited. Alliterated sounds in *where, care, tremble* elaborate the state of frustration. The use of question marks may allude to rhetorical questions but most important they connect the voice of the narrator with the audience. The narrator quest for answers is unstoppable despite feelings of silence from his/her audience. The imageries on the sense of seeing and feelings are explicated in relating to the narrator as audience bonding. The terms *see* and *feel* are used persuasively with an aim of convincing the audience to accept the speaker's point of view. They enhance the reasoning power of the poet as exclaimed; *Don't you see the horror in my eyes? Can you not feel the pain as I tremble?* The interplay between phonological, syntactic and semantic devices in creating the poem arrests the attention of the reader.

Further consideration is lines 14 and 15: *My playground destroyed with their bombs that had no concern for my ruined toys*: The implication of *playground* and *toys* is very symbolic to the life of a child. As Tomesello, Striano and Rochat (1999: 1) note in their research findings, in the early development, children begin to comprehend and use some linguistic symbols and symbolic gestures on the basis of their skills of social cognition and cultural learning. The playground and toys provide a chance to the children to interact, manipulate, innovate and create an emotional relationship and, to some extent leads to independence. In relation to Jean Piaget's developmental stage theory, a conducive environment is important to developing a creative and innovative mind (Burgemeester (2017). The expressions in the poem generate a significant reflection and insight into the psychology of an overburdened mind. This is exhibited when the poet notes: *Living in refugee camps was no luxury*. In essence, the refugee camp does not provide space for the child to be a child. The innocent child in this poem is at a formal operational stage. He/she is using personal experience and schema to develop logical thinking and abstract reasoning. The absence of toys and playground symbolize lack of freedom and space to express own thoughts as children. Lack of essential developmental items infringe upon the freedom and rights of the refugee child. As observed earlier by Bond, this finding confirms that children in camps grow up in conditions which do not permit their socialization according to the values of their own cultures.

The overall image of the innocent child gives a picture of a child in the wilderness who has survived on its own. No doubt, the innocent child has added a voice to the debate and discussion of the plight of refugee victims.

## **6. Refugee: the symbolic quest for identity.**

Trang and Lau (2002) cite their definition of a refugee from Article 1A (2), *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) as someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unwilling to return to it". Similarly, Mattei (2016: 59) makes reference to European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) report noting that the identities of migrants are challenged in the camps; because they are considered illegal, and have no rights. He further expounds that deplorable conditions in the camps erode human dignity and hope which are significant in preservation of identities. In the quest for her identity, Lamiya Safarova, 9 years old, resists to be called a refugee. She cries out as she reminds

her new schoolmates that her name is Lamiya Safarova. This emphasis is expressed in her poem **Don't Call Me "Refugee"** My Name is Lamiya". Lamiya's poem sadly expresses her feeling about the identification and categorization of her new social status. She knows quite well that she does not deserve to be in this status. The young poet stresses:

My life, my destiny  
has been so painful, so don't call me refugee.  
My heart aches, my eyes cry,  
I beg of you, please don't call me "refugee".  
It feels like I don't even exist in the world,  
As if I'm a migrant bird far away from my land  
Turning back to look at my village.  
I beg of you, please don't call me "refugee".

Oh, the things I've seen during these painful years,  
The most beautiful days I've seen in my land,  
I've dreamed only about our house.  
I beg of you, please don't call me "refugee".

The reason why I write these sad things  
is that living a meaningless life is like hell.  
What I really want to say is:  
I beg of you, please don't call me "refugee".

(Safarova 1999: 78-79)

The poet explicates a sensuous richness of language which conveys sincere and innocence genuine complexities of meaning inhibited in the poetic voice. The dialogic conversation between the poet and her interlocutor unfolds a powerful quest of identity. Her innermost repulsive expressions are seen in the repetitive denial of being a refugee: *I beg of you, please don't call me "refugee"*. Right from the beginning, Lamiya is cautious and cautions her audience about her categorization. Contextually, the term refugee is derogatory, dehumanizing, stigmatizing and symbolizes people of low status.

The concepts *My life, my destiny* are connected with a comma yet gives a semantic cohesion of meaning of life to destiny. The contextual circumstance calls for an understanding that perhaps a refugee's destiny is unpredictable. The use of the term destiny point to a dark future as set by historical painful experiences. The tone of dejection is affirmed in the phrase: *"It feels like I don't even exist in the world"*; reinforcing and reinstating the earlier reasoning on her destiny. Such a pattern of psycholinguistic expression underlines the self-consciousness of the young poet of "who she is". The use of a simile through a comparison of life with hell emphasizes the hopelessness of the current state of the poet.

The young poet feels that the world has disowned her. At her tender age, life is meaningless. She feels bitter. Her destiny is oblique; it is full of darkness and grief. The senses of pain, anger and anguish are voices raised emphatically in the poem. The poem is recited with a lot of grieving emotions. The sound can be detected from the words cry, call, beg and say. All these words symbolize the poet's quest for identification. This choice of auditory diction raises the voice of the poet to her audience, to listen to her agony. Her deepest consolation is in her getting an opportunity to assert her identity: *The reason why I write these sad things, What I really want to say is: I beg of you, please don't call me "refugee"*. It is evident therefore that poetry has given the refugee

child a platform to assert and express her innermost feelings.

The poet's sense of sight that reminds her of her beautiful home has not faded away. She is agonizing on where she is today. She even compares her life in the camp with hell, a place of suffering. Though the past experience is not elaborative, the recollection of the past tells of how beautiful it was. The tone of the speaker is disgusted, annoyed and resentful. The sense of feeling points towards a world that is not safe for her, she feels like she does not even exist. Life is meaningless, compared to hell (last stanza). The diction of seeing and feeling captures the analyst attention. *My heart aches*, *My eyes cry* are phrases explicating visual and feeling imageries calling for empathy from the audience. The engagement of the heart, which is a physical organ experiencing pain as a resultant of *mistaken identity* is a clear indication of the disillusionment of the poet to her new status and new environment. The emphasis on the use of personal pronoun *I* and *me* pointing to the self is an assertion of liberty and quest for respect.

The psycholinguistic process entails drawing attention to such lexical items and input, noticing awareness and consciousness as well as their connotations within their contextual parameters. Hell and the metaphoric expression *life is meaningless* symbolizes a total loss of hope in life. In processing this thought, the reader feels the painful experience of the poet.

### 7. Personification and the sense of longing for a belonging

As a literary device, personification is a projection of characteristics that normally belongs to humans onto inanimate objects. These characteristics can also include emotions, feelings or motives. Lamiya at age 12 is quite conversant with this state of affairs as construed in the poem **If a Person Doesn't Love His Country**.

*Land, I Don't Know Where I Lost You*  
*I can't suffer the pain that you have in your chest,*  
*I can't make your dream come true,*  
*I can't come to see you for many years, Land.*  
*I don't know where I lost you, Land.*

*Today we need to have our land back*  
*God, please lets us see our land this spring,*  
*let us wipe its tears away soon,*  
*I don't know where I lost you, Land.*

(Lamiya Sarova 1999: 78-79)

The direct and personalized dialogue between Lamiya and land draws a passionate feeling of the poet to her origins. The poet depicts land as a human being which has pain and dreams. In the third stanza, the poet uses the collective *we* to wipe the tears of land. This is a proof on how the young poet is passionate about land. As one reads the poem, you feel and hear the inner voice of the poet not only to repossess what was once hers, but also the longing to go back home. The immediate connection to land provides a sense of history, linking the past with the present and unfolding the fading away memories of the poet's once precious economic and or social resource.

As experienced elsewhere, life in refugee camps is *imprisonment* (Bond 2000). The passion under which the poet personifies land is evidence of the discomfort faced in refugee camps. She wants to be free and inn essence to live a normal life.

Similar expression is detected in the following sentiments by an Afghanistan child:

*What is happening to our country  
That some of us are burning  
And others are benefiting?  
Our country is broken into pieces  
Yet still I remember my broken land  
And cry for it*

(Coleridge 2001: 9)

In this poem the young child is raising questions that need answers. The ironical juxtaposition of “burning” and “benefiting” raises paradoxical questions that the young poet seeks knowledge about. The paradoxical antagonism of the harsh realities of Afghanistan is expressed in: *Our country is broken into pieces, Yet still I remember my broken land*. One would imagine that the poet would give up at this moment, however he ends on a high note of adding his voice of reason as being part of the solution as he says: *And cry for it*. The psychological input of this statement elucidates an intimate relationship between the poet, his land and country. This is a very powerful part of this poem. The expression may be twofold; either the poet is sympathizing with the unstable conditions back home or sympathizing with its current state.

Yearning for belonging is a psychological and social human need. Belonging provides a close and secure social integration. It taps into feelings and perceptions of association. Being immigrants *like a bird far away from my land* as had been expressed by Lamiya, the poets feel dejected, anxious, isolated and unsupported. Connecting to their past, the young poets’ stories relate emotionally to their land, village, homes, house, people and cultures. The refugee camp may not adequately provide this psychosocial and economic relationship. The context in which the children understand their past is critical in this sense. Realizing that they do not belong in their current *home* catalyzes their inquest for self-identification. Home brings about the imagery of socioeconomic values, comfort of belonging and a sense of ownership. The sense of belonging gives a child the democratic space to explore and manipulate their environment. It is imperative that the feeling and attachment to land add some poetic sensibility to the quest for a belonging. Personification connects the poet to her country and land. It helps the reader to understand and sympathize emotionally with the poet.

## 8. Conclusion

Much research has been conducted into the lives of people living in refugee camps, their risks and challenges using sociological perspectives. The current presentation offered a unique and distinct methodology of researching into the feelings, thoughts, aspirations of young refugees, and how they conceptualize their lives in the camps. To explore an in-depth research into this question, the paper set out to investigate the poetic devices employed to articulate the voices of the children, how they reason out their plight while in the refugee camps. Five poems were selected randomly through internet sources which formed primary data of analysis. To create a holistic insight into the children’s subjective experiences and perceptions, psycholinguistic approach was employed.

It is the findings of this research that in conveying their feelings children employ effective and affective literary devices such as metaphors, similes, assonance, repetitions, allusions, imageries and personification. As one reads and analyses the poems, you feel the intensity of the emotions of sadness, loneliness, anger, anguish and even happiness. Indeed poetry has been embraced as a philosophical and intellectual medium used by the young poets to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Children exposed to war zone regions have had no peace and stability in their lives; death, disgust, despair, rejection, dejection are outstanding themes realized in the poems presented. They

have led a life of a journey characterized with physical and psychological torture and trauma. The initiators of the instability, wars and calamities have neither mercy nor sense of feeling pity to the innocent young victims. The young children find themselves in the wilderness of -the refugee camps without their knowledge. In the examples of the poems provided, it has been discovered that behind the art of poetry lies the prowess and freedom of expression by the children, which crafts their critical skills, critical thinking, reasoning and emotional expressions.

Poetry in this sense has not only been used as a stress-coping mechanism but a tool that can bring about transformational thoughts. The language and imagery used is inspirational and philosophical too. Coming from different parts of the world, different languages, colors and cultures, stigmatized and heartbroken, children too have a feeling that they share a common historical background. They have a role to play in changing their society. The unity of purpose to fight the enemy of being branded refugee is a special cord in their lives and the lives of their parents. Poetry is hence seen as a powerful instrument used to mend the broken lives and minds of young immigrants. It stands out to be a platform where the children find solace.

In this presentation, we experience and appreciate how artistic initiatives resonate on a deeper level reconnecting refugees to their cultural roots of their identity. In quest of their identity and a sense of belonging, the young poets have exercised their philosophical and artistic prowess not only in articulating oppressive themes, but also reconnecting to their ancestral homes and land through poetic imageries, metaphor, analogy, and personification.

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